

Foch Strategy, by Seizing Initiative, Saps German Line of Its Strength

Allied Victories in West
Give Them Numerical
Superiority

Ludendorff Reserves
Drawn Into Struggle

Tactical Advantages Are to
Reduce Threatening Sa-
lients in Our Lines

By Hilaire Belloc

Author of "Elements of the Great War" and Britain's Most Distinguished Military Critic

(Special Cable to The Tribune)

LONDON, Aug. 24.—There are two things in the war theatre at the present moment which command the attention of all serious observers—I mean, of course, in the Western theatre of the war, which is the only one where the final issue of the great campaign can be decided.

First, there is the actual series of active operations between the Somme and the Oise, the most acute sector upon which is that at the Lassigny Hills. That is the obvious feature which strikes every eye.

But the second thing is more important and, indeed, it includes the first: It is the general strategic situation created by the two great Allied victories, the first between the Marne and the Vesle from July 18 to August 3, and the second that which is still in progress between Arras and the Aisne, and which has been going on from August 8 to the present day. The first and most obvious point needs but brief commentary this week, both because its character is simple and clear and also because the movements involved have not been on a large scale. I propose, therefore, after briefly summarizing this situation, to make most of my article this week deal with the major or second point—the general strategic situation.

Fresh Troops Stabilize
Enemy Line

The Germans have succeeded in nearly stabilizing their line between the Somme and the Oise, and they have done this by constantly pouring in fresh divisions from their reserve until now they have already used something less than forty but more than thirty-five divisions. Even so, however, they have been unable completely to arrest the movement pressing against them, and in particular they have constantly lost a little round, day after day, in the Lassigny Hills.

This is not due to the fact that they are weaker in this sector than elsewhere. It is due to the fact that the attack is willing to spend more energy in this sector than in others, and for a reason often described in these articles—the capture of observation points.

The Lassigny Hills, as we know, overlook from their northern escarpment the plains across which the southern portions of the German army must retire if they are compelled to further retirement.

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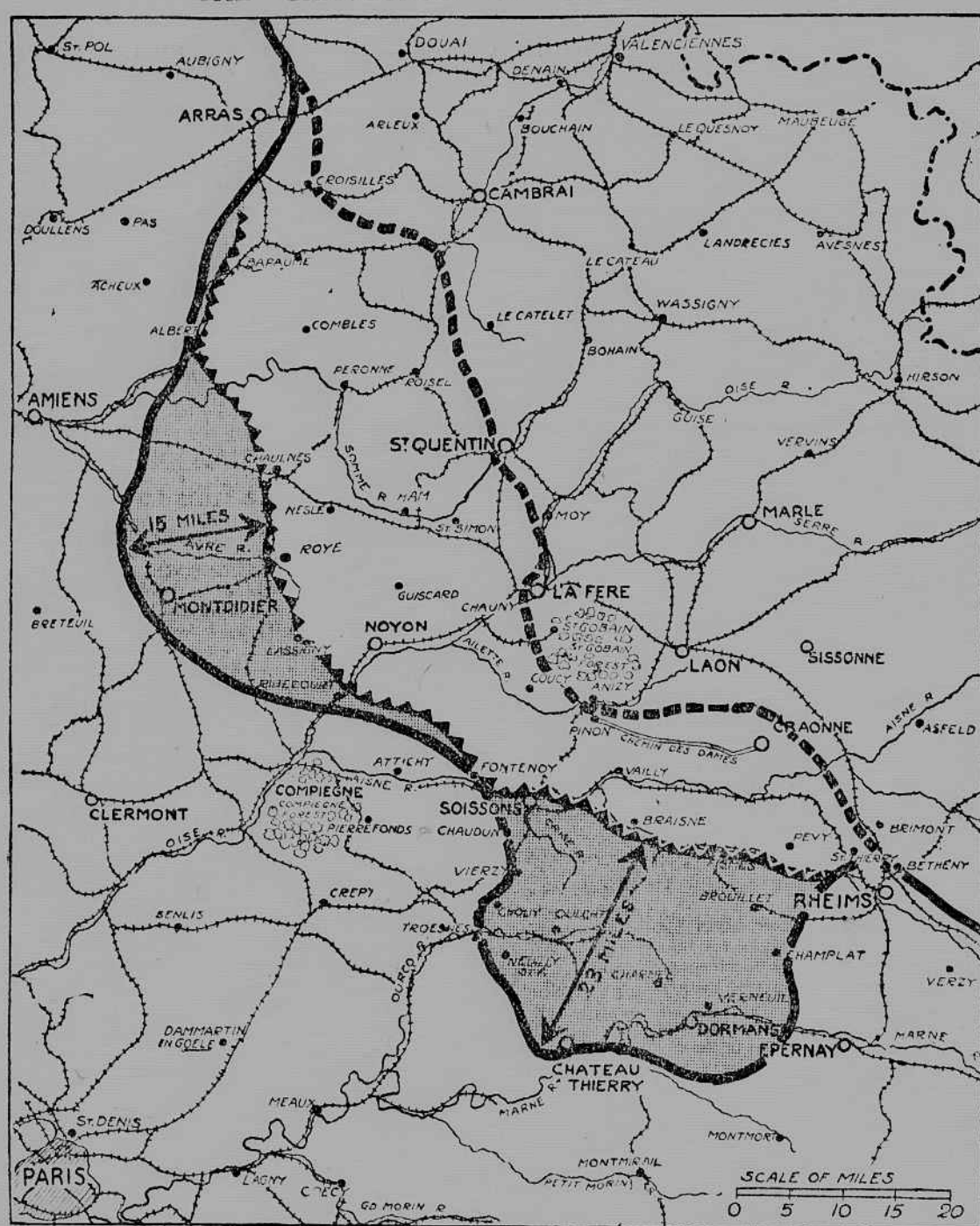
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THE GRAVEYARD OF GERMAN HOPES



This map shows where Foch, by his counter attack on July 18 and his offensive of August 8, has forced the Germans to use up three-fourths of their reserves in meeting his initiative, while his own reserves have not been drawn on to any such extent. The shaded areas show the ground from which the Germans have been driven, while the heavy broken line shows the front from which they started last spring.

across which the wounded must be sent back, together with empty vehicles and tired units, and across which supply of all kinds, relief units and (in that ruined land) everything down to water must be brought forward.

To have your opponent enjoying direct observation of your roads at a few thousand yards' range is obviously an immense disadvantage. It does not compel your retirement—if it did the Germans on Messines Ridge for more than two years could have compelled the retirement of the British from the Ypres salient, which they did not do. But this advantage on the part of your opponent compels you to waste men at a very expensive rate.

Eastern End of
Ridge Still Held

The French, after more than a week's battle, had not gained possession of the chain of observation posts which marked the northern escarpment of the Lassigny Hills, though they were still forcing their way ahead slowly. Their positions at that time were these: They held those observation posts on the western end of the range which are least important because they are nearest the German front which stretches north at right angles to the ridge; the posts which, therefore, are less valuable for directing artillery interference with the German communications behind that front. But they had not yet gotten complete possession of the observation posts on the eastern end of the ridge, which would give command over the roads far behind the German front.

The reason for this is that this range of hills, which dominates the plain to the north by from 300 to 400 feet, is not a narrow ridge, such that possession of the summit gives one an immediate view beyond. It is, on the contrary, a rounded formation, of which the summit is an almost flat plateau. Further, the central part of the plateau has been cleared and occupied by large farms, while toward the edge, especially on the northern side, as one reaches the escarpment, are great woods. The consequence is that though the French reached the summit and the clearings where the farms are they were not yet able to look down upon the plains across which the German armies had to be moved. The Attichy farm, for instance, which was reached by the French on August 18, is at the top of the hill, but affords no observation. They must get forward another mile more into the woods before they come to the sharp dip on to Thiescourt from the summit, from which one can look down through the trees onto the plains below.

If it be asked why the French are thus pressing so heavily for,

possession of ground which, at best, would only lead to the enemy's retirement, and need not even compulsorily do that, the answer is that the enemy has proved his unwillingness to give up this ground, partly for political reasons at the moment and partly because of the difficulties connected with such a retirement. These make it certain that he will continually put on fresh men and try to check the French pressure. This drawing of more and more German reserves into the battle is necessarily the main object of all that is taking place on this front.

Have Reduced Two
German Bulges

This leads me to the second and more important of the two points—the general strategic situation. The Allies have advanced on the map since July 18 about twenty-three miles at one place and fifteen at another at the maximum points. But that does not materially affect the main strategy of the moment in their favor—at least, it does not do this of itself. It is the evidence or symptom of what has happened; it was not the objective of what has taken place.

In addition the Allies have won a very great success in that they have reduced the two great German bulges, one reaching almost to Amiens and bringing that very important railway and road junction under heavy fire, and the other coming to Château Thierry and threatening with a few miles' more advance to bring Paris itself under fire. The first bulge rendered unusable the great arterial railroad from the coast to Paris, which was the main lateral communication of the Allies in the north. The second rendered unusable the main arterial line from Paris to Chalons, Verdun, Nancy and the east, which had for nearly four years been the trunk of lateral communication of the Allied line in its centre. Therefore the reduction of these bulges or salients by the two victories of July 18 and August 8 was of real and obvious strategic value.

But even this was not the chief aim or the chief result of the double success. The chief aims and the chief results of the double success were two:

First, to recover the initiative. Second, to reverse what may be called the balance of effective power.

Understanding
the "Initiative"

As to the first, this word "initiative" has been dealt with so often here that I am almost ashamed to return to it, but one cannot understand it too clearly. I will repeat the definition, "He that gives form to the battle is said to possess the

initiative." That means that when of two opponents one is so situated that he can always make the first move and can make the actions of the other consequent upon his actions, then this first one may be said to possess the initiative so long as that state of affairs continues. It does not involve necessarily a superiority in numbers of men or in material, though that superiority is a great advantage in obtaining and retaining the initiative. It does not even necessarily involve attack, though of course the examples of the initiative being held by defence are rare (Plevna in the Russo-Turkish war was an example).

The essential of the initiative lies wholly in this faculty of always being able to make the first move. We know what it means in chess or wrestling, or in any other form of competition, and it is of supreme importance in war. It releases the energy of the general's mind; it leaves him free to follow out one plan instead of perpetually changing to meet the changes of his opponents. It gives to the side which possesses it all the moral value of creative power; it inflicts on the side that has lost it all the moral weakness of anxiety.

When the Germans attacked on July 15, in that great offensive of theirs on either side of Rheims which was to decide the war, they fully possessed the initiative. Three days later, on July 18, the initiative passed to the Allies. Why? Not because of any sudden change in numbers—it is probable that the numerical superiority was still slightly on the enemy's side. It was still less because the Allies were counter attacking. The initiative passed from the Germans to us because our surprise between Soissons and Château Thierry put them into such a posture that they had to meet it or suffer disaster. In other words, they had to conform their plans suddenly to the plans of Marshal Foch.

Hitting Harder
Than the Foe

As he went on striking at his will and where he chose, every successive move was one in which the enemy still staved off disaster by noting what his opponent was doing and conforming himself to it as rapidly as possible. When the enemy had prepared his line and was established on the heights of the Vesle, thus gradually reducing Foch's power of exercising the initiative, a new stroke in front of Amiens carried on the succession of movements designed on our side and not on the enemy's and so it has gone for over a month, with all the advantage which the initiative conveys.

Now let me turn to the other object for which, indeed, the initiative

is being used, and which is to reverse "the balance of effective power." This means, in other words, to change from being hit harder than you could hit back to a condition in which you are hitting harder than the other man can return your blows. The effective striking power is composed of two things—always supposing that tactical ability is equal on both sides. It is composed of superiority in the numbers of men and in material; but it is also composed of another element—more subtle and more difficult to understand—which we may call "the superiority of free organization."

The unit of organization of a great army—its cell, so to speak—is the division. Supposing that a Red Force of ten divisions is opposed to a Blue Force of ten divisions. There is here no numerical superiority. The Red Force is organized with five divisions in the front line and five in reserve; so is the Blue. Now suppose that the Red Force possesses the initiative and by proper use of that advantage compels the Blue to bring, one after another, all five of his reserve divisions into the battle without winning it, while the Red Force itself has been compelled to bring in only two out of the five and still has three fresh divisions to use as occasion requires.

Winning With
Equal Losses

Even if the losses during these manoeuvres are equal on both sides the Red Force has a great and increasing advantage, because every one of the Blue cells, so to speak, has been wounded, while three healthy cells remain for the Red general to use as he chooses, and the throwing of these into the battle at the end would probably decide it.

This is an exceedingly important point, and really a simple one, though not very easy to make clear. The chances are, of course, that the Red Force, with the initiative properly manoeuvred, would not lose so much as the Blue, and having called in only two reserve units while compelling the Blue to call in five would inflict greater losses upon the Blue than it suffered itself. My point is, that even if the losses were equal, the inequality in the use of reserves and the fact that one party had made the other use all his reserves, while still keeping some of his own intact, would put him more and more in a position of superiority.

Now, the Allied initiative has been used in both these branches. In the past month it has secured a numerical superiority at just the critical moment; that is, at just the moment when the Germans still possessed the advantage and were using it for the last time, and it has also heavily exhausted the enemy's reserve divisions. A month ago the enemy had, besides the force gathered for immediate combat, a reserve of about sixty divisions. In the short space of four weeks that vast body was reduced by three-quarters, while the number of reserves correspondingly called in on the Allied side was not comparable to so tremendous a suction. That does not mean, of course, that three-quarters of the enemy's reserve has been destroyed. What it does mean is that three-quarters of the cells in that organism are now bruised or wounded cells, while nothing like three-quarters, indeed nothing like half, in the corresponding organism of the Allies has as yet been touched.

A division which has been through the mill of battle has to be withdrawn, refitted, recruited and rested before it can be used again, and if the process of sucking your enemy's reserve divisions into battle be rapid enough you reach at last the stage in which he has no reserve power left and must fight "all out," while you yourself have a reserve in hand to throw in where and when you will and decide the issue.

Complete Reversal
of Effective Power

In the element of numbers General Foch has used the initiative with equal skill. The enemy's total losses in prisoners, killed and wounded during the one month from July 18 cannot be much less than 400,000 men, of whom about a fifth, or a little less, are prisoners in Allied hands. More than another fifth are dead, and yet another fifth are mutilated, leaving only a remaining two-fifths, or 160,000 men, for hospital cases, which will ultimately be returned to the actual forces. The enemy has lost in the same period over 1,700 guns.

Germany has to recruit for the future nothing but hospital returns and the class of 1920, which will shortly begin to appear in the field and which will number altogether, before it is exhausted, about 450,000 lads. The Allies have their own corresponding classes and the overwhelming advantage of American recruitment proceeding at a pace of certainly not less than 30,000 bayonets a week actually added in the field—a total of 50,000 for all the Allied armies, and possibly more, apart from artillery and all auxiliary units.

There is, therefore, as complete a reversal of effective power as there had already been of the initiative. And that is how the situation stands now, toward the close of the second of the great Allied strokes and perhaps upon the eve of the third.

Foch's Strategy Keeps Military Experts Guessing

Some Insist He Is Paving
Way for a Decisive
Blow

LONDON, Aug. 24.—The ultimate aim of the strategic plan which Marshal Foch is working out in the present series of battles is the subject of much speculation, both in London and Paris. Broadly, the military experts are divided into two camps.

Some believe that Marshal Foch is striking a number of hammer blows with the object of weakening the enemy numerically, and, as regards positions and morale, preparatory to a decisive blow at some absolutely vital spot. Others think that at present the generalissimo is endeavoring to disorganize what is really a great German retreat or intention to retreat on large sectors, being content to reap the rich fruits of this disorganization in the shape of big hauls of prisoners and material, and to allow later results to guide him in the matter of more decisive action this year.

Some able French critics hold to the second view, which is based on the theory that an enemy withdrawal is gradually going to some new Hindenburg line, which probably is of greater depth than the first one. Those who argue that the world is witnessing the preliminaries to a decisive stroke base their belief on the fact that the Allies presumably are employing very considerable forces, in the aggregate, in the present battles, that they are exploiting their gains to the utmost, and that they already are threatening vital enemy positions. They think, also, that it would be folly not to push to the last degree this year the immense advantage of Allied initiative, superior morale and enthusiasm for an offensive, especially among the Americans.

Other considerations pointed out, apart from weighty political reasons, are that the Germans still have many divisions in Russia, and possibly may have still more divisions prepared for a surprise enterprise this year on some other front. Hence, it is argued, it is not absolutely certain that a better chance will be offered in 1919, for the German front in the West is now more or less fairly "liquid."

Wilson Preparing To Meet German Peace Offensive

President Believed to Have
Conferred on Situation
With Colonel House

(Special Dispatch to The Tribune)

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24.—The recent conferences between President Wilson and Colonel E. M. House have been the subject of interested speculation in international circles here, where they were believed to have concerned developments in the war, and particularly an anticipated peace offensive by the Central Powers.

It is everywhere thought that the extensive operations on the Western battlefield will soon be arrested by the approaching winter, and that while the fighting during the winter season will be on a larger scale than heretofore, the possibility of a military decision being attained before the latter part of 1919 is excluded.

Germany is expected to make a more definite bid for peace than she has previously done, either directly or through the mediation of a neutral government. The only circumstance she will be able to advance as an argument in favor of opening a discussion of terms at a formal meeting, some diplomatic experts here assert, is the fact that she is able to prolong the war, and its ending by negotiation would save the lives of many thousands and bring to an end the incalculable destruction of wealth.

There is, however, no inclination in any quarter here to welcome any peace overtures from the enemy. It is considered that the requirements of America and of the Allies are such that Germany would not accept them as a basis for calling a conference. There has, nevertheless, been some interest manifested in the attempt of German statesmen in the last few weeks to make concessions, as indicating the preparation of the German public for the formal announcement of more "reasonable" terms of peace than the "unreasonable" terms of the Berlin government. The weakening of the Berlin government has been a gratifying result of the continued successes of the Allied armies. They are expected to have another important consequence, the dissipation of hopes of victory in the other enemy countries and the destruction of their confidence in the superiority of German arms.

There is the greatest uneasiness in Austria-Hungary over the developments on the Western front, as well as over the problems that will be projected by the approaching winter, for which the Dual Monarchy is ill prepared.

Indications also point to increasing dissatisfaction in Turkey and Bulgaria. The situation generally of the enemy nations is declared to make certain the early inauguration of another peace drive by Germany.

Special Order of Valor Is
Awarded to Foreign Legion

PARIS, Aug. 24.—A new fourragère or aiguillette has been devised for the Foreign Legion in recognition of its having won eleven citations in official orders. The legion was the first organization to be awarded the first fourragère, which is in the same colors as the War Cross. It was the first winner of the second fourragère, which has the colors of the military medals, and was the first and for a long time the only winner of the third fourragère, which is red, the color of the Legion of Honor.

It now will be the first and only organization to carry the new fourragère, which is a tricolor.

Japan Expects Fall Of Terauchi Cabinet

(Special Dispatch to The Tribune)

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug. 24.—The rice riots in Japan have resulted in wholesale arrests and casualties, according to a special cable from Tokyo to a Japanese paper here. But the rigorous censorship prevented newspapers and magazines from publishing the news of the ever-spreading hunger riots under the threat of total suppression of the publication. The reason given is that the government is afraid of the effect of the news of the riots on the fevered mob sentiment in various parts of the country.

The "Kokumin Shimbun," whose editor, Mr. Tokutomi, is a personal friend of many of the leading Japanese statesmen and politicians in and out of office and which is always credited with an intimate knowledge of the inside workings of Tokyo politics, predicts the fall of the present Terauchi Cabinet.

It says, according to another Tokyo cable message, that the Terauchi Cabinet will resign immediately after the settlement of the present rice riots, shouldering the responsibility for the disturbance. The reason for the resignation is that it has been unable to prevent the riots by taking such precautionary measures as would have been effective.

The Emperor contributed out of his own private funds about \$1,550,000 for the relief of the poor. The rich people followed the high example. Both the Mitsui and Iwasaki families have contributed 1,000,000 yen each and other private contributions for the relief are reported to amount to about 10,000,000 yen. These sums, in addition to the governmental appropriation of 10,000,000 yen, are reported to be enough to meet the crisis until the appearance of the new rice, at the beginning of September.

Activities of Trade Board Are Protested

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24.—Recent activities of the Federal Trade Commission in relation to big business interests have drawn an emphatic protest to President Wilson from the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. It was learned to-day that the headquarters of the chamber here has sent a letter to the President vigorously criticizing the commission and making suggestions, it is understood, for changes in personnel and methods.

The letter has not been made public, and White House officials declined to discuss it in any way. Bitter resentment against the commission among some of the leading business interests was aroused by its report on profiteering, submitted to the President, on the basis of Treasury income tax returns, as well as by the protracted investigation of the packing industry, culminating in a report denouncing the five great packing concerns as a monopoly and recommending that the government assume complete control of the meat industry by taking over and operating stockyards and other facilities.

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